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ABSTRACT

In response to faculty demands for time to update professional skills, the California Legislature inaugurated a Flexible Calendar Pilot Program allowing six community colleges--including Saddleback College (SC) in Mission Viejo--to utilize up to 15 days of non-instructional or released time on planning and professional development activities. Since the program's inception in 1976, SC faculty have engaged in a number of workshops, seminars, and individual activities aimed at updating courses, developing instructional materials, exploring alternative instructional methods, and broadening professional contacts. In addition, many faculty members have combined "calendar" time with vacation or travel time to supplement their research through visits to distant locations. These activities, conducted as a separate, highly visible program under the coordination of a staff development administrator, have strengthened the sense of professional autonomy among faculty members and have increased their role in making critical institutional decisions. While a statewide program evaluation indicated that most faculty members preferred to engage in individual professional development activities, over 80% of the faculty members accepted the program as a permanent part of the academic structure, and their participation has increased over time. Thus, the program has proven a powerful tool for individual and organizational growth. (JP)

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THE FLEXIBLE CALENDAR PILOT PROGRAM AT SADDLEBACK COLLEGE

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The Flexible Calendar Pilot Program at Saddleback College

In his classic vest-pocket study on community college faculty, Junior College Faculty: Issues and Problems, 1967, Roger Garrison reports an interview in which a beleagured instructor told him:

> "I feel like the driver of a huge bus crammed with people, careening down a mountain road at increasing speed. I'm followed by other buses... and we simply can't stop. All I can do is concentrate on keeping the bus on the road. Yet more than anything else, I'd like to turn off once in a while to ask myself what the destination of the bus is."

This faculty member was not lamenting his lot. He was merely expressing, in a metaphorical way, a need for time to "take his bearings afresh"--time to locate himself in relation to his curriculum, students, college and community.

More recently, Arthur Cohen cited the same Garrison study and highlighted the complaint by many teachers that they "did not have enough time to keep up in their field, to develop new teaching approaches, to do a good job of preparing for their classes, to discuss educational matters with their colleagues, to give adequate attention to individual students, or to participate effectively on committees." Cohen cites other studies which indicate that teacher's time is more than that "normally equated to workload formulas and pay scales." Much more time is spent by the professional teacher in classroom preparation, cummiculum development, and course update which normally takes place outside the classroom. A recent letter in an educational journal reflected this theme:

> "I am an average college professor...what an I doing during these vacations when I an not in the classrooms? I read the journals and the books that I do not have the time to read during the teaching months. I prepare for classes that I will soon be teaching. I think. I write."

Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer, Two-Year College Instructor Today, 1977, find that community and junior college faculty would like more organizational or "company" time to plan, revise, and update their courses and programs, and in the process, interact professionally and socially with their colleagues. They further observe that the colleges which are successful in their development programs are those which utilize an approach that results in "some kind of combination of personal and released time." It is this "combination" which constitutues the strength of the Flexible Calendar Pilot Program which has been in operation at Saddleback College since the fall semester of 1976.

Flexible Calendar in California Community Colleges

The California Legislature (AB 2232) inaugurated the Flexible Calendar Pilot Program during the fall semester 1976. Six colleges were selected, all of which were volunteers. The flexible calendar permits the participating colleges to reduce their instructional calendars from 175 to 160 days. This legislative authorization enables the "pilot" colleges to utilize up to 15

days of noninstructional or released time on activities predicated on the following guidelines:

Colleges may plan and execute those projects and activities which they deem important, such as design of courses and programs on basis of student demands and needs, increase of articulation with institutions of higher learning, moving students into local labor market, etc. In addition, activities which contribute to the below-listed instructional and development areas are encouraged:

--Student personnel services.
--Learning resource services.
--Community and public services.
--Various activities associated with the above but not limited thereto:

...Student advising.
...Guidance and orientation
...Staff development and inservice training
...Course, curriculum, and learning resource development
...Department and division meetings-conferences/workshops
...Program development and evaluation
...Institutional research
...Any necessary supporting activities.

A "no gain/no loss" mechanism was established for the pilot project and has proven to be an adequate procedure in preventing "serious budget changes due to the pilot program."

Pilot Program in Action

Saddleback College, located in Mission Viejo, California, has participated in the flexible calendar pilot program since its inception in 1976. Saddleback was one of the early petitioners who saw this program as a major resource in coping with the problems of increasing enrollments, campus and building expansion, and human resources development. Since the beginning, Saddleback has concentrated on staff development and inservice training activities, spread out over a span of four years (1976080) and encompassing a total of 60 non-instructional days. Aside from the institutionwide events which have been scheduled (faculty workshops, division shopcases, seminars, media fairs, forums, etc.), faculty have engaged in a variety of selective activities:

1. Updating of course content.

2. Developing new instructional materials for classroom use.

3. Field visits to other college programs or those related to their program areas.

4. New course/program development.

5. Major redesign of courses.

6. Exploring alternative insturctional methods.

7. Developing new materials for course/program evaluations.

8. Subject area research.

9. Broadening professional contact.

There are other activities which were reported, but those listed above represent the most frequently conducted.

During the first year, the problems of implementing the flexible calendar centered around the major effort involved in developing an initial staff development needs assessment for the ordering of program priorities. As a pilot program, the calendar called for considerable "experimentation and discovery." One prominent social scientist declares that "the emphasis of pilot programs should be on variations...flexibility, innovation, redirection, reorganization are all desirable." In the four years of its operation at Saddleback College, the flexible calendar has witnessed a number of changes and developments which have helped make the college a more dynamic educational institution:

1. Ther are strong indications that college community of kinship has been strengthened. Professional autonomy has been a major force in operating the pilot program. Faculty have been given the authority to decide for themselves what individual activities they will pursue and the time they will allocate to each. Victor Baldridge identifies autonomy with the "right to

make critical task decisions." At Saddleback College, this policy of promoting "faculty autonomy" has been instrumental in maintaining the pilot program as an integral part of the total educational system.

2. Feedback from faculty surveys, conducted and analyzed after every inservice period (5 days in august and 10 days in January), has been fed continuously into the system to affect desirable changes and adjustments. The magnitude of the task (to utilize 90-120 hours of program time) requires a major effort in collecting and analyzing data which can be used to evaluate the various activities going on. Too, given the unauthoritarian nature of the guiding policies, a relationship approaching symbiosis between staff development and college personnel is most desirable as an objective in order to keep the flexible calendar, its goals and objectives, in the mainstream of college activity.

3. Throughout the entire period of its operation, the pilot program has been the direct responsibility of a coordinator or administrator. The availability of an external consultant, to assist in planning and in eveluation, has been of great value in lending stability and cohesion to the program, particularly in the areas of "information diffusion and analysis," feedback, and data collection and evaluation. Staff members who have administered the pilot program have done so largely on their own time and have recieved a modest stipend for their service. As the program matured--during the middle of its 3rd year--a steering committee or division liaison group was established to take on a significant role in an advisory and communicative capacity. Responsibility for directing the flexible calendar program remains with the staff development administrator (current title).

4. By and large, the pilot program has been carried on as a separate and highly visible function, following closely the model which William

Bergquist and Steven Phillips identify, in their Handbook For Faculty Development, Volume 2, as the "natural group model." This model or approach capitalizes on the "natural relationships in the college as well as the natural helping networks to increase (their) capacity to meet community college needs." In simpler language, the resources and structure, which are already in being, are managed in such a way that staff development needs are met. A number of administrators and teachers have regularly conducted workshops, seminars, and courses in such timely topics as "Teachers Are Counselors," "Competency-based Instruction," "Building the Curriculum," "Promoting-Selling Your Course," "Awareness Workshop," "Cognitive Style Mapping," "Techniques of Evaluating Student Behavior," "Student Outcomes and the Syllabus," "Human Potential Seminar," "A Holistic Approach to Teahcing," and a 30-hour course in "Advanced Techniques in Media Production." The variety and diversity of these classes, a small percentage of the total offered to date, is testimony to the skill and didication of the college staff.

5. The staff development program conducted to date has been, essentially, noncompetitive. Recognition or awards have not been given, although the pilot program has moved ahead in a positive manner. Each inservice period has featured at least one or more innovative event or activity which had never been done before. In January 1980 in-service period, a media fair was held which ahd as its focal point successful "media" projects completed by other faculty. About 70% of staff attending the fair found it to have "moderate" or "high" value to their teaching development. Devision "shopcases," half-day in length, were even more enthusiastically received. The Counseling Division presented an orientation workshop followed by four workshops which

ranged from "Tools In The Kit For Academic Advisement" to "Occupation Burnout and Stress Management." Other divisions (Fine Arts, Business Science, Natural Science, etc.) combined entertainment with instruction and received high marks in the process. A recent study on faculty development highlights the "subtle, yet important issues" which corporate or group activities, properly executed, can address themselves to contribute directly to faculty renewal by fucusing on "colleagueship, community, encouragement, motivation, and support."

6. As can be seen from much of the above, experimentation and diversity have been mainstays of the Flexible Calendar Pilot Program at Saddleback College. In addition, many faculty have combined "calendar" time with vacation or travel time to visit distant locations, with camera and noteblik to supplement their research and study. In many cases, they have been able to bring their findings and discoveries back to their classrooms and laboratories. Whitehead's dictum is appropriate here, "There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations." An instructor who participates on a field trip to a tropical rain forest or who attends legislative sessions in nearby states has this interest in mind. A sizeable minority have also utilized the "noninstructional time" given them with great energy and application. Fir this group, flexible calendar time has served as the "starting fuel" for projects which habe required additional time on the part of the individual faculty member for completion.

Some Preliminary Findings and Conclusions

Edward Suchman suggests, with considerable authority, that "evaluation has its greatest success with new and experimental problems." At Saddleback, evaluation largely formative in scope, has been an integral part of the program for the beginning. Each inservice program has been evaluated and the results made available to the college staff. Evaluation has served as a "lever of change." (The author has served as an external consultant

and assisted in this regard.)

In addition to the internal evaluation, the Chancellor's office has carried out its own investigation of the flexible calendar pilot project at Saddleback College and the other colleges participating. Some of the findings reached are included below:

a. The vast majority of the respondents (staff and students) are very satisfied with the "early semester" or flexible claendar, especially since it eliminates the post-Christmas "lame-duck" session. Over 90% of students, faculty, administrators are in agreement that ending the semester before Christmas is a positive feature of the Calendar.

b. Although faculty appreciate the value of institutionwide events that are scheduled during each inservice period, the large majority of them prefer time to engage in individual activities (as listed above). In evaluating the January 1980 inservice program at Saddleback College, the author wrote:

> "Only 57% of the respondents stated that "scheduled activities were appropriate to their needs and interests." This question has elicited varying degrees of response in past surveys. In 1978 (with Garrison on campus), this persentage was 62%. Generally, this aspect of staff development programs is one of the most challenging and depends greatly on the ability of the program's organizers to interpret and to produce effectively a needs assessment for the entire college. The challenge is met, in part, by enlisting the cooperation of the individual staff member who is asked to select those institutionwide events he desires to attent, while using the remaining time available engaged in authorized individual or divisional projects or activities."

c. Communications among faculty within divisions has improved significantly. For some of the more enterprising divisions, this improvement in communications extends to the part-time faculty who participated in divisional workshops, retreats, or meeting.

d. Input by the faculty in planning and designing the flexible calendar

program has been generally satisfactory, and it has increased over time. Over 80% of the faculty accept the flexible calendar on a permanent basis. Evaluation has shown that there have been no significant "losses" (faculty who changed theri minds). More importantly, there have been "gains" (faculty, once-opposed, who "did not believe in it in the beginning, but now do").

e. The faculty has also given a resounding disclaimer to the belief that the following have suffered:

...the quality of instruction.
...adequate coverage of course content.
...drastic revision of courses necessary.
...student achievement adversely affected.

Final Thought

The flexible calendar pilot program introduces a new dimension of major proportions to both staff and organizational development. Time is the precious commodity which permits a multiplicity of approaches that encourages faculty to renew their own skills and increase theie competencies and in the process, breathe new life into the organization. The pilot project has provided 15 noninstructional days for individual and organizational growth. Its enthusiastic acceptance by the vast majority of the staff and students bodes well for the future of the California community college which chooses to adopt this system. The vitality of the institution is at stake. In the years ahead, the flexible calendar could serve as the bulwark for taking on the challenging issues and problems which face the community colleges.

Any staff or organizational development program which follows on the heel of a pilot project will still need sponsorship by higher authority. More importantly, it will need, and in return, should foster, the direct support of administration, faculty, community and the state. The record in this regard is positive and encouraging. There is every indication that the flexible calendar will continue its dynamic role within the California community college system.

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